



# UPDATE

Newsletter of the N.Y. African Burial Ground Project

Spring/Summer 2002

• Special Edition •

Volume 3, Issue 7

## RECOVERING FROM 911: An Open Letter to the OPEI Public

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dear Update Readers:

The destruction of the OPEI offices at 6 World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, will forever leave its mark on the OPEI staff, myself and hundreds of thousands of others affected in hearts, minds and spirits by this tragedy. We were very fortunate in that no member of the OPEI staff was killed or injured, although even today many of us are yet traumatized by the events of that fateful day.

Since that day, there has been for me an almost daily re-examination of what is and what is not important in my life. Close calls with death I am told have that effect on some. Over the past ten years, the work of creating and maintaining a public information office for the landmark African Burial Ground, one of the most important archaeological sites in contemporary times, has been challenging, exhausting and awe-inspiring. Many times I have doubted that I was the right person for this tremendous undertaking.

The rebuilding of the OPEI offices has begun in earnest. Again, the task is at once overwhelming and challenging, and yet it is a tremendous opportunity.



Reverend Jesse Jackson and Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson (l) lead a group of clergy from the Rainbow Coalition in prayer at the African Burial Ground during their New York reparations tour in April, 2002. Photo credit: Charris Walker

We have relocated to 201 Varick Street and are in the process of recovering and recreating our research and media files. The OPEI public education staff has presented off-site information to more than 1,500 people since the September tragedy. In April 2002, we resumed our African Burial Ground site tours (see page 12 for OPEI staff photos). In that same month, Reverend Jesse Jackson and clergy members of the Rainbow Coalition visited the site for a historical tour and to offer spiritual solace. On June 8, 2002, nearly 25 new volunteers completed training to assist in “spreading the word” about the African Burial Ground Project (see page 8).

*(Continued on page 13)*

**“All those years of work without wages are the foundations of America’s wealth. America must acknowledge its roots in the slavery empire, apologize for it and work on some plan to compensate.”**  
Reverend Jesse Jackson

*Update*, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground Project (OPEI). Inquiries about the Project may be sent to 201 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014. Our telephone number is (212) 337-2001. To fax inquiries call (212) 337-1447. Please send e-mail inquiries to nyabg@worldnet.att.net.

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## Letters to the Editor

### Voices of Concern...

I'm relieved that your staff was not injured during the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th. You sent me a letter: "Press Release, September 25, 2001." That's how I knew where to send this letter.

Trudy Morris  
African Burial Ground  
Project Volunteer  
Queens, New York

I hope this brief letter finds you and your staff uninjured, safe and well. This is my fourth letter to you since the 9-11 attack with the hopes that you and all your staff safely evacuated your building and the area. I trust by now there is a way to forward mail to you, because for over seven years I've been receiving the *Update* and have been involved in the commemorative stamp drive. I've come to love and adore you, your knowledge, commitment and how you've organized a great staff. I pray you're safe. I wish I was free to assist you in anyway I can, but due to my ongoing confinement, I want you and your staff to know spiritually I am there with you.

Mosi O. Paki  
Youngstown, Ohio

I was unaware that you were affected by the World Trade Center disaster and I pray that all are safe. It is good to hear that you have resumed public activities. Although I have not gotten to NY to participate in any of the activities yet, I really appreciate the newsletters and the activity listing. Perhaps now that I am retired I might be able to get to the activities. Thank you.

Betty J. Penn  
Frankfort, Kentucky

I cried when I received the postcard from OPEI today. I've been praying for all of you as well as for all the others lost and saved at the World Trade Center. I called the number to the old office

*Letters to the Editor*  
*Continued from page 2*

and a recording advised to call back later. I began crying again and praying for all of you! This has been a hard time for the entire world! It was also my third time trying to find out if you were all safe. Praise God for letting me hear from you. I pray that God continues to bless and keep us! In Peace and Love,

Sadye M. Pierce  
African Burial Ground  
Project Volunteer  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

SANKOFA. Please receive my warm greeting. Thank you very much for your invitation to the Kwanzaa Celebration on Saturday, December 29, 2001. I was very sorry that I could not attend the festivities, but I am thankful that OPEI staff survived the maelstrom of 9/11. Enclosed please find a poem which I wrote to commemorate that day:

11<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2001  
(THE DAY THE TWIN TOWERS FELL)

Alastor swept over Manhattan  
On 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001 on a  
Fiery chariot drawn by steeds  
Whose nostrils poured forth flames  
The Twin Towers were left a-smoking  
And angrily toppled with burning disdain.  
Death visited indiscriminately that day  
Within, without, and under the Towers;  
Burnt and mangled bodies and body parts –  
Some victims were totally consumed  
In the resulting fire and crush of stone –  
Littered about for blocks it seemed  
To those who witnessed the scene.  
The Angel of Death swung his scythe that day  
With a vengeance that startled the eyes.  
Mountains of words and oceans of tears  
Will not wipe the slate away,  
And Alastor rides on his torrent of vengeance  
Across the world today.

Mario Armando Maldonado  
Cape Vincent, New York

It was about a year ago or less that my husband and I found your office and gallery in the Customs House. We sat down to watch a very informative video on the history of Africans in NYC and the discovery of the Burial Ground. We learned much during that visit.

After the terrible tragedy of 9/11, we often wondered how you all fared and prayed that no loss of life occurred among the very pleasant group of young ladies we met that day. We were relieved to receive your card in the mail telling us that you are back in business again! We hope to be able to go on one of the tours in the near future.

Marion Tunney  
Sayville, New York

Today is the day of commemoration of September 11. It brings back many memories both of the horrible tragedy of WTC and of the good times that were had at WTC #6, OPEI headquarters. I am in awe of the African Burial Ground and the beautiful people who have come through the corridors of the African Burial Ground Project. I am proud to have known some of the people who were once a part of it, like Chadra Pittman and Marie-Alice Devieux and others who still work with the Project like Donna Harden Cole and Emilyn Brown.

I was overjoyed to find out that all who are current staff survived the horror and still continue on. I always inform others of the African Burial Ground every opportunity I get. I am so proud of the work you've done Dr. Wilson. God Bless you.

Najah Palm  
African Burial Ground  
Project Volunteer  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**OPEI welcomes letters from its readers  
but reserves the right to edit for  
length and clarity**



# **SANKOFA III: An Update on the African Burial Ground Project**

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Compiled by Emilyn L. Brown,  
Donna Harden Cole and  
Ruth Rose

The recent Sankofa III Conference hosted by the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia May 15-19, 2002 and organized by Dr. Michael L. Blakey, now a professor of anthropology at William and Mary and the Scientific Director of the New York African Burial Ground Project, appears to have been a critical success. The conference provided a platform for the Project's many accomplishments as well as a checklist of final goals briefly summarized below.

## **History**

Dr. Edna Medford, facilitator of the Project's historic research team, which includes Africanists, Caribbeanists, and those with expertise in the history of the British North American mainland, indicates her team has focused, among other things, on tracing the likely ethnic origin of the African population in New York. "Gaining some idea of the nature of the societies from which they originated helps us to understand the responses of enslaved people to their circumstances in New York," Dr. Medford explained. "To that end, we are also studying the experience of Africans in their homelands and

the ways in which their traditions, customs and belief systems were both retained and altered in the Caribbean and New York."

Noting the presence of various African ethnic groups in New York — from the Akan-speakers of West Africa to the Kikongo groups of Central West Africa and the Malagasy of East Africa — Dr. Medford concludes "although they came as individuals from diverse ethnic groups, they formed cohesive communities. In their daily life

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**"Enslaved Africans  
in New York never  
accepted the idea  
of merely being  
property."**

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in the institutions they created, in their cultural traditions, in their forms of resistance and especially in the care with which they buried their dead — they affirmed their humanity. Enslaved Africans never accepted the idea of merely being property."

The historians have also documented a broad range of labor tasks in all phases of colonial life, including unskilled labor, farming and highly skilled artisans and craftsmen. A draft report was submitted by the team to GSA in the fall of 2000 for peer review. Peer review is the process of sending out draft reports to academic scholars who in turn

provide critical commentary and recommendations. The goal of the final history report is to expand on such topics as religious worship, burial rites and systems of social network.

## **Archaeology**

The Project's archaeological team, headed by Dr. Warren R. Perry, outlined the difficulties that have checked the progress of analyzing the African Burial Ground artifacts. In February 2000 the archaeological laboratory at 6 World Trade Center was closed by the General Services Administration (GSA) due to lack of funding. The September 11<sup>th</sup> destruction of the World Trade Center twin towers caused extensive damage to 6 World Trade Center which formerly housed the OPEI office and the archaeological laboratory. The building was subsequently demolished.

Rescue efforts in the aftermath of 911 led to the recovery of a substantial number of soil samples, coffin hardware and artifacts originally found in grave shafts which is the dirt fill that surrounds each coffin. Significantly, no artifacts from the African Burial Ground recovered from Ground Zero were destroyed. Analysis is expected to resume shortly.

Grave goods and artifacts buried within individual coffins were not impacted by the World Trade Center disaster. Those items had been previously removed from the 6 World Trade Center laboratory





**Project consultants of the African Burial Ground Project include (l. to r.) : Dr. Edna Medford, Project historian, Dr. Theresa Singleton, a pioneer in African archaeology, Dr. Fatima Jackson, specialist in DNA studies, Dr. E. Kofi Agorsah, African art historian and Dr. Alan Goodman, responsible for conducting chemical analysis on the ancestral remains. Photo credit: Jean-Marie Cerasale**

and shipped to Washington, D.C. in preparation for reburial with the ancestral remains in August of 2001. When the reburial ceremony was cancelled, the artifacts remained stored in Washington, D.C. The physical remains, still housed in the Cobb Laboratory, are currently under the supervision of Dr. James Donaldson, Dean of Howard University's College of Arts and Sciences. As Principal Manager, Dr. Donaldson works directly with Dr. Blakey and the African Burial Ground Project consultants.

### **Genetics/DNA**

Dr. Fatima Jackson's presentation underscored the potential use of DNA to retrace the regional migration of men, women and children from West African societies who may have been buried in the

African Burial Ground (See *Update*, Winter 1996 and Fall 1998 for a more detailed discussion of issues, strategies and findings presented at earlier Sankofa conferences). An interview with Dr. Jackson is slated for the fall issue of *Update*.

### **Public Education**

(See Letter to the Public page 1).

### **Conclusion**

The African Burial Ground reports that will ultimately be submitted to GSA include a revised two-volume text on the African, Caribbean, and North American history of the African Burial Ground population. The physical anthropology report concerning the ancestral remains is currently being revised. It is expected that with the exception of

the analytical report from the archaeological team, which now has a different deadline, the final reports for the Project will be completed in December 2002, prior to any plans for reburial of the ancestral remains.



**DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS  
ABOUT THE  
AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND  
PROJECT?**

**Please send inquiries  
to our  
e-mail address:**

***nyabg@worldnet.att.net***

## OPEI Announces

### The African Burial Ground

Year 2002

Poetry, Short Story and Essay Competition



### Guidelines

- The Competition is open to students at elementary, junior high, high school and college levels.
- One winner and a runner-up will be chosen from each educational level.
- Winning entries will be published in *Update: The Newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project*.
- This competition is for poetry, short stories and essays that focus on the subject of the New York African Burial Ground or the African presence in colonial New York City.
- Short story and essay entries should be 1200 words or less. Poetry entries should be 150 words or less.
- The evaluation of submissions will be based on clarity and original themes.
- All entries must be postmarked by February 28, 2003 and sent with an official entry form.

**For an entry form and information package  
please call (212) 337-2001**



### Web Watch

- ▶ Check out the national database of African American cemeteries online: <http://www.prairiebluff.com/aacemetery>
- ▶ For a wide range of primary documents and articles pertaining to African and African American history go to The History Net: <http://history.about.com>
- ▶ For a glimpse of Caribbean culture go to <http://www.afrocubaweb.com/> and the National Library of Jamaica: <http://www.njl.org.jm>
- ▶ Teaching with the National Register of Historic Places offers a way for parents and teachers to provide public education about historic sites and preserve them as well. Visit the National Park Website: [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp)

## *A Thank You Note...*



The director and staff of OPEI would like to thank the following publishers who donated books to our office in the aftermath of the World Trade Center disaster of September 11, 2001.

### A

A & B Books Publishers  
Abingdon Press

### B

Beacon Press  
Betterway Books  
Black Classic Press  
Blackwell Publishers Inc.,  
John F. Blair, Publisher

### C

Cambridge University Press  
Candlewick Press  
Carolrhoda Books  
Checkmark Books  
    an imprint of Facts on File, Inc.,  
    Div. of Oryx Press  
Civitas Counterpoint  
Cornell University Press  
Crane Hill Publishers  
Crown Publishing Group  
Cumberland House Publishing

### D

Da Capo Press  
Dimensions for Living  
Dover Publications, Inc.  
Duke University Press

### E

Facts on File, Inc.  
Farrar, Straus & Giroux  
Fordham University Press  
Front Street

### H

Harcourt, Brace & Company  
Harper Collins Publishers  
Henry Holt and Company  
Hill & Wang  
Houghton Mifflin Company  
Hyperion

### I

Indiana University Press

### J

Jossey-Bass

### L

Lerner Publications Company

### M

McFarland & Company, Inc.,  
Publishers  
M.E. Sharp Inc., Publishers  
The Millbrook Press

### N

The New Press  
New Amsterdam Books,  
    Ivan R. Dee, Publisher  
New York University Press  
Northeastern University Press  
W.W. Norton & Company

### O

Oxford University Press

### P

Pantheon Books  
Penguin Books  
Penguin Putnam Inc.  
The Pennsylvania State  
    University Press  
Plume  
Pocket Books  
Pomegranate  
Prentice Hall, Inc.  
Princeton University Press

### R

Random House  
Running Press  
Rutgers University Press

### S

Scholastic Inc.  
Scholastic Press  
Simon & Schuster  
Simon and Schuster Books for  
    Young Children  
South End Press  
Stewart, Tabori & Chang, Inc.

### T

Ten Speed Press  
Texas A & M University Press  
Thames and Hudson, Inc.

### U

University of Alabama Press  
University of Arkansas Press  
University of California Press  
University of Chicago Press  
University of Georgia Press  
University of Illinois Press  
University Press of Kansas  
University Press of Kentucky  
University of Minnesota Press  
University of Michigan Press  
University of New Mexico Press  
University of North Carolina Press  
University of Pittsburgh Press  
University of South Carolina Press  
University of Virginia Press  
University of Wisconsin Press

### W

Warner Books  
Washington Square Press  
Westview Press  
John Wiley and Sons, Inc.  
Writer's Digest Books

### Y

Yale University Press



















## OPEI

### Volunteer Profile: Peter Cole

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Donna Harden Cole

Peter Cole, a resident of Hempstead, Long Island, is a Corrections Officer with the Queens Correctional Facility in New York. Although he has an arduous task at the facility of keeping order and all that goes with that, he still finds time to share information with others in the hopes that he can make a difference in someone's life.

This is especially true when it comes to the subject of the New York African Burial Ground (ABG). This has been a topic of interest to volunteer Peter Cole for some time now. He recalls reading about the remains being uncovered in the various newspapers such as *Newsday*, *The New York Post* and *The New York Times* during building construction in the early 1990s. He remembers being excited about the find and wanted to explore deeper about how the remains of our African ancestors were going to be handled. He had visited the site during the recovery stage and looked forward to hearing more about what the government was going to do with these precious remains.

Peter has always had an interest in African American history. The exploration of African American bur-

ial sites is especially interesting to him. He is a member of the Association for Gravestone Studies, based in Greenfield, Massachusetts. This liaison allowed him to study gravestone rubbings by becoming an apprentice under a master gravestone rubber.

A master gravestone rubber himself now, he has rubbings from the headstone of one of the enslaved on the historic Amistad ship who is buried in Farmington, Connecticut, as well as a freed slave named

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Caesar who is buried in Scotts-plains, New Jersey. This skill proved fruitful during his own genealogical search where he did some gravestone rubbings at his family plot in North Carolina.

Further investigation revealed, for example, that his great-great-uncle was the personal valet to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (U.S. poet, 1807-1882) who financed his great-great uncle's education at Oberlin College making him one of Oberlin's first black graduates. This same uncle is buried in Wadsworth, North Carolina, a town named after Longfellow's mother. Peter also

learned that his great grandfather is the co-founder of Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Peter's research, which predates the discovery of the ABG, taught him that slavery in America was not just a southern practice, but that indeed, there were enslaved Africans working in early New York. Peter further learned that these individuals were greatly involved in the building of this city. Therefore, when he heard about the discovery of the ABG, it only confirmed what his research had revealed to him earlier and this encouraged him to continue with his research.

He was elated to learn that there was a volunteer program at the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground Project (OPEI). Peter has become very active in the volunteer efforts of “spreading the word” about the ABG Project. “If we don’t care about our cemeteries who will? It would be a tremendous loss to the culture if we do not pay attention. It is also important to the African American community to find out more about every aspect of our history,” says Peter.

He also has encouraged his daughter, Melissa, an “A” student who is starting college in the fall, to become a volunteer as well. He convinced Melissa by helping her write a history report on slavery. She initially was going to do the

report on the South and its involvement with enslavement in America. After learning about New York's slave history, Melissa changed her report to reflect that information and received an "A" on the paper. Even Peter's wife, Fay, is enthralled with the Project. "This is a very worthwhile effort that should be continued. The African Burial Ground is very important" says Fay.

Peter has participated in numerous OPEI programs, offering his assistance wherever he is needed. Peter is also a freelance photographer and has offered on many occasions to photograph events for the Project.

An avid reader as well, Peter has also taken the time to collect all three volumes of *Update*, the newsletter for the New York African Burial Ground Project, as well as other OPEI publications such as the *Classroom and Study Guide*. When the OPEI lost their offices, located at 6 World Trade Center since 1993, during the attacks of September 11, 2001, Peter offered to supply copies of all the reading materials and photographs he had to assist with the OPEI recovery efforts of research materials.

During the aftermath of September 11th, Peter was also one of the OPEI volunteers who called numerous times to check on the status of the OPEI and staff members. After sending e-mails and making calls,

he was relieved to learn that all OPEI staff members were safe and accounted for.

As a law-enforcement employee, Peter was also able to visit the World Trade Center site during the recovery and clean-up stage of the attacks. He volunteered to assist with the "Bucket Brigade" which involved filling buckets with the many, many piles of debris to help clear the area for search efforts and clean up. Peter also assisted with security where needed. "Sometimes there was little that I could do with all the devastation at Ground Zero, but I was glad to be there to help in anyway I could."

He visited the area of 6 World Trade Center to see what could be recovered of the OPEI offices there. He photographed the area only to realize that the OPEI had been literally obliterated. To his recollection, much of the building was lying in a smoldering heap of melted steel beams and twisted debris where only the periphery of the building was left standing.

The news of the OPEI's relocation to 201 Varick Street was reassuring to Peter that the ABG Project was moving forward regardless of what occurred on that fateful day of September 11, 2001. Peter envisions a world-class museum as an end product of the Project and looks forward to learning more about the lives of those recovered from the site. Currently enrolled in Master's

certification program (agronomy and horticulture) at the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada, Peter is hopeful that the ancestral remains will be reburied as promised and that the legacy of the ABG will continue.



## ***DID YOU KNOW?***

- ▶ **More than 200 ancestral remains are still buried in the preserved portion of the African Burial Ground**
- ▶ **The 5.5 - 6 acre African Burial Ground is the largest colonial-era cemetery to be excavated in the United States.**
- ▶ **Burials dating back to the 18th century and possibly earlier were preserved beneath 16 - 25 feet of soil fill.**
- ▶ **The African Burial Ground was designated a National Historic Landmark on April 19, 1993 [D 4/19/93 NHL, 93001597].**





### ANNOUNCING A NEW OPEI VOLUNTEER DIRECTORY

Find out who's who among OPEI volunteers and add your own name, special interests and skills to the growing list of more than 250 individuals who currently help disseminate information about the African Burial Ground.

### ATTENTION EDUCATORS

**We are now scheduling class activities for Fall 2002. To receive our free services, which includes:**

- ▶ **Landmark ABG Site Tour**
- ▶ **Historical Slide Presentation**
- ▶ **Documentary Film Showings**

**Please call (212) 337-2001 or send e-mail inquiries to:**

***nyabg@worldnet.att.net***

### ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?

**Please submit your name and/or corrections to  
OPEI**

**201 Varick Street,  
Room 1021  
New York, NY 10014  
Tel. (212) 337-2001  
Fax (212) 337-1447**

## HISTORY AT A GLANCE



**June/July/August**

*1674*

Francisco Bastien, a free black, purchases the Manhattan site called "Crommessi" by the Native Americans and is known today as Gramercy Park.

*June 19, 1738*

*The New York Weekly Journal* publishes the advertisement, "Several likely Negro Boys and Girls to be sold by John Bell, they have had the Small Pox, enquire of the said John Bell."

*June 15, 1755*

Known as a writer and itinerant preacher, John Marrant, a native New Yorker, traveled to Nova Scotia where he served as a missionary.

*June 21, 1821*

The African Methodist Episcopal Church (Mother Zion) was founded in New York City.

*July 11, 1863*

The New York Draft Riots develops in response to Conscription Act that allowed exemptions from military service in the Civil War for \$300. Irish rioters, blaming blacks for the War, lynched blacks, burned their homes and the Colored Orphan Asylum.

*August 10, 1808*

The African Methodist Episcopal Church petitions for a burial site in the Potters Field in Washington Square Park after being cited for overcrowded conditions in their burial vaults beneath their building at Leonard and Church Streets.

#### **Sources:**

- *The Black New Yorkers*, published by the Schomburg Center
- *African American Almanac: Day-by-Day Black History*  
Leon T. Ross, Kenneth A. Mimms
- *The New York Weekly Journal*, No. 240





## AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND UPDATE

Compiled by Donna Harden Cole

### ■ Prayer Vigil

A brief prayer vigil, organized by Mother Franklin, took place at the African Burial Ground on Thursday, May 23, 2000. Two additional vigils have been scheduled for July 24th and August 21, 2002 at 12 noon on each day.

### ■ OPEI Welcomes New Staff:

**Dorian Harrington** is a twenty-year-old graduate of Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., with a major in Music Industry and Technology. He participated in Mercy's cross-country track team and was a co-founder of African Descendants of One Mind (ADOM). ADOM members participate in seminars, conferences and cultural activities in the tri-state area.

During high school, Dorian attended Murray Bergtraum High School in New York City where he co-founded Construct-I-Son, an organization devoted to the study of the problems confronting young African males in inner city communities and developing plans to ensure their futures. He also attended the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-Violence where he graduated

from the Ella Baker - Cleveland Robinson Academy.

Dorian's passions include hip-hop music and organizing for youth empowerment. As an artist, he has performed at area colleges, city clubs and community-based organizations. Dorian believes the education of youth is the key to social and political empowerment.

**Claudeston G. Massiah**, who is originally from Guyana, South America, migrated to the United States and lived in the Washington, D.C. area for a number of years. He holds a BA in English from the

Washington Saturday College at Howard University, Washington, D.C., a BS in Business Administration and a MBA from Hamilton University, Evanston, Wyoming.

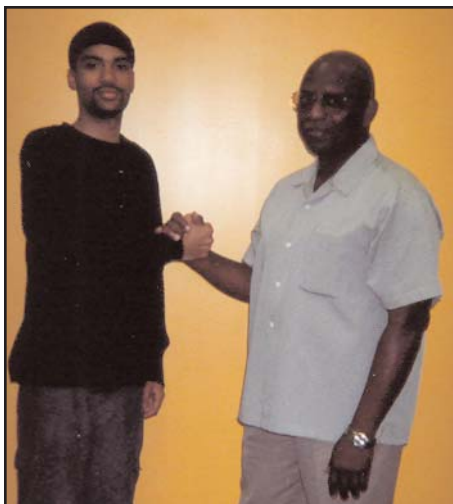
Claudeston's work experience includes managerial positions in the retail industry, the human services field and an eleven-year career with the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics as an Economic Assistant and an E.E.O. investigator. He has traveled extensively in Africa including Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Zanzibar and Ethiopia.



Prayer vigil participants included, in the back row from the left: community activists Jim Murray, Miriam Francis and Dr. Albert B. Front row from left: Lula Roberts, Mother Franklin, Emilyn Brown, Shaniqua Maxwell Singleton and Charris Walker.  
Photo credit: Donna Harden Cole







**Dorian Harrington (l) and Claudeston Massiah (r) enjoy a moment of solidarity. Photo credit: Charris Walker**

Along with his role as public educator at OPEI, Claudeston currently holds a teaching position with Colony South Brooklyn House in their after-school program. He sees his work at the OPEI as a wonderful opportunity to not only learn and fill in the gaps as it relates to his own history and culture, but to share this information with others, particularly the youth.



**Susan Price,** a Historical Research Assistant at OPEI, has worked as a

children's swim team manager, a circulation manager at a magazine for the visually impaired and as an administrative assistant. She voluntarily monitors and protests against the New York City Parks Depart-

ment's cutbacks to children's summer swim programs. Over the last three years, Susan's family history projects for herself and others, has proven to be her most rewarding work to date.

A granddaughter of orphaned survivors of the Armenian genocide, Susan understands the difficulties facing African Americans who wish to learn more about their family history. She believes the study of our ancestors' experience will help us to understand ourselves. Susan and her daughter Eva are lifelong residents of the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn.

**Andrea Rogers** joined OPEI in July 2001 as a Public Educator. She holds a BA in History and



English from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and has taken graduate classes in African history at the University of Virginia.

A new resident of New York, Andrea is excited to participate in a project that allows her to learn the history of New York from an African historical perspective. In addition to her duties at OPEI, Andrea enjoys working on her family's genealogy and hopes to

travel to the Caribbean and Africa. She is also developing plans to pursue personal and academic goals in the field of history.



**Shannel Simon** joined the OPEI staff as an Administrative Assistant in July, 2001. She migrated from the

island of St. Vincent to New York in November 2000 and has an educational background in history and slavery. She has also completed a Certificate of Achievement for Microsoft Office Professionals at the Xincon Technology School.

Shannel enjoys working with the staff at OPEI, where she continues to learn about the history of slavery in New York City.

#### ■ Staff farewells

OPEI would like to extend best wishes to former staff members Ruth Rose, Libby Jackson, Tamara and Kahlil Shaw, Scott Johnson, Keith Mitchell and Elise Alexander. We wish them success in their future endeavors.

■ **A special thanks** to Sherrill Efthymious, Jason Crockett, Michael Moschetta and Jacob Cartayas who helped with moving tasks during OPEI's relocation process and with the painting of our new office.









There is still much work to be done. We anticipate the reopening of the OPEI Public Reading Room in August 2002. I consider my life and the lives of the OPEI staff members to be a gift. Telling the story of free and enslaved Africans who lived and died building early New York is more important than ever. This undertaking I accept as a sacred public trust. Few, in my mind, are given such an important opportunity twice in a lifetime. I have every hope that I will be successful in this assignment and will learn from mistakes made in the past. This time around, I have the distinct advantage of being very clear that, indeed, I am the right person, in the right place, at the right time to fulfill this mission with God's help, the help of our ancestors, colleagues and many supporters and advocates.

I wish to thank the many individuals who called, sent letters and e-mail missives inquiring about our safety and whereabouts. We are truly blessed to be able to begin again. Many people now draw parallels between the colonial African Burial Ground and the former site of the World Trade Center. Many tragic losses are associated with both locations. As I see it, it is the duty of the living to honor and to remember.

As always, we are guided by the Ancestors,

Sincerely yours,



Sherrill D. Wilson  
OPEI Director

## OPEI 2002 CALENDAR OF EVENTS



### August 24, 2002

Summer Film Festival and Site Tours  
@ 290 Broadway  
12:00 noon - 4:00 p.m.

### September 14, 2002

Volunteer Training @ 201 Varick Street  
11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

### November 16, 2002

Fall Educators' Symposium

Call (212) 337-2001 for information and reservations. All events are free and will be held in government buildings. Space is limited, reserve early.

*Reservations are required*

### In the Next Issue of

### *Update:*

- ▶ **An Interview with  
Dr. Fatima Jackson**
- ▶ **Community Voices:  
The Issue of Reparations**
- ▶ **Media Representations of 18th  
Century Africans -- Runaways**



# SPRING/SUMMER 2002 READING LIST

Compiled by  
Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson  
and  
Jean-Marie Cerasale

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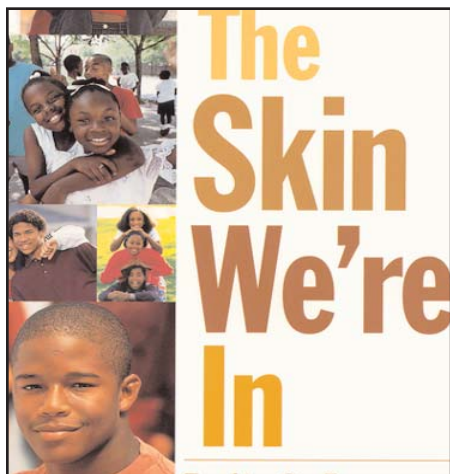
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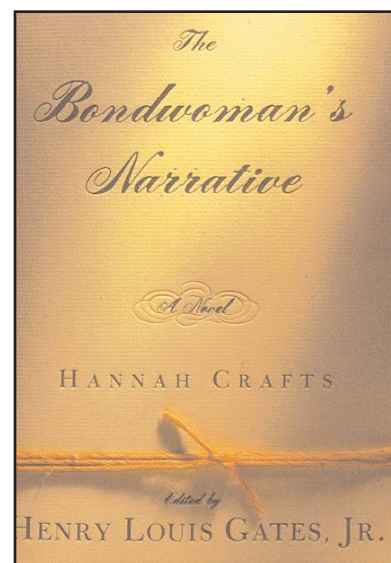
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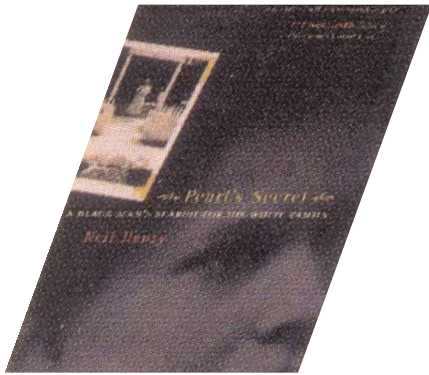
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***Pearl's Secret: A Black Man's Search for his White Family***

**Author:** Neil Henry

**Berkeley:** Univ. of Calif. Press, 2001

**Price:** \$24.95

**Reviewer:** Emilyn L. Brown

*Pearl's Secret* explores the historic impact of race, class and sexuality in America. "Both blacks and whites have shown an uneasiness about this history," explains author Neil Henry, professor of journalism at the University of California at Berkeley.

Henry's work joins a growing list of books about mixed race heritage, including *The Color of Water* by James McBride and *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Saga in Black and White* by Shirlee Taylor Haizlip. His family memoir is similar to these works in that it exposes America's racial hypocrisy. It differs through its effective use of a 150-year-old family mystery.

As Henry's narrative shifts between present and past, his family's history is played out against a backdrop of reconstruction, Jim Crow segregation and the Civil Rights era. His memories are inspired by family heirlooms that include a faded letter, an obituary and a picture of A.J. Beaumont, the white man who fathered Pearl, Henry's great-grandmother.

Henry grew up constantly hearing about Beaumont's migration from England to the American South in 1859, his service in the Confederate Army and his successful career as a businessman and landowner in Louisiana.

It was in a small Louisiana town that Beaumont became involved in a long-term relationship with Laura Brumley, Henry's great-great grandmother. Born into slavery, Brumley gained enough education to support herself prior to emancipation. It was her self-sufficiency that provided the foundation for her descendants upward mobility.

The reasons for the abrupt end to the Brumley-Beaumont relationship, the ways in which their daughter Pearl attempted to maintain family ties and the whereabouts of Beaumont's descendants, are all

critical aspects of the family mystery. After Laura Brumley and Pearl moved to St. Louis in the early 1890s, Beaumont refused to write until 1901. His letter contained his picture and an acknowledgement of "the great injustice" he caused by failing to claim Pearl as his daughter. In reality, the letter was a deathbed confession.

The mystery is painstakingly unraveled during the six years that Henry conducts genealogical research and travels to Louisiana. Driven by the need to confront the southern male arrogance and appropriation of black womanhood that Beaumont symbolizes, Henry ignores his parents warnings, and unearths numerous family skeletons, some of which are better left buried. In a twist on stereotypical notions of race and class in America, he also discovers that the plight of Beaumont's descendants, facing economic decline, sharply contrasts with the wealth and social status of his own family.

*Pearl's Secret* is sometimes burdened by numerous digressions and repetitious detail, but its greatest strength may be its reluctance to construct an artificial happy ending. Instead, it succeeds by probing America's past in search of the roots of modern day racism.



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**ADDRESS LABEL**

